Group 2 Paperwork ELS 122

A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF PHILLIP UMEH'S AMBASSADORS OF POVERTY

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AMBASSADORS OF POVERTY BY PHILLIP UMEH

Ambassadors of poverty are
The corrupt masters of the economy
With their head abroad
And anus at home
Patriots in reverse order
Determined merchants of loots
Who boost the economy of their colonial order
To impoverish brothers and sisters at home

Ambassadors of poverty are
The saviours of the people
Office loafers in the guise of workers
Barons of incompetence
With kleptomaniac fingers
And suckling filaments
Position occupants and enemies of service
Locked in the corrosive war of corruption
With their people’s treasury
And killing their future

Ambassadors of poverty are
The dubious sit tight patriots
Frustrating the corporate will of their followers
The beleaguered,hungry and famished owners of the land
People priced out of their conscience and power
Incapacitated by destitution
Unable to withstand the temptation
Of crispy mints and food aroma

Ambassadors of poverty are
The political elites
In air conditioned chambers
And exotic cars
With tearful stories of rip offs
Tucked away from
Their impoverish constituencies
Lying prostrate
With death traps for roads
Mud for water
Candle for light
Underneath trees as schools
Rat for protein
Fasting as food
And alibi as governance

Ambassadors of poverty are
The rancorous elites In battle of supremacy
For the control of power
And their people’s wealth
Mowing down their own
With white man’s machine
Oiled by the prosperity of black patronage
Counterpoised by deprivations
As the corpses of their able-bodied men
Women and children lie un-mourn
In shallow graves
In their fallow farmlands
Long abandoned

Ambassadors of poverty are
The round trippers
The elusive importers
Of unseen goods and services
Sand inclusive
Who trip the economy down
By tricking form M
For harvest of dollars as import
When their people see neither money nor food

Ambassadors of poverty are
The able-bodied men on the street
Without motives,without vision,without mission
Men fit for the farm
But glued to the city
Hungry and desperate
Constituting willing tools in the hands
Of political overlords
For mission of vendetta
Against political foes
In their fight for power

Ambassadors of poverty are
Those who actions and inactions
Reduce their people’s expectation to nothingness
Those who antecedents
Have lost the spark to inspire
While their people lie in surrender
Having been defeated by poverty

Ambassadors of poverty are
All of us whose in-actions
Steal our collective joy
Because of what we should do
Which we never do
As we bargain away
Our conscience in the market place
Under the weight of poverty
To assuage our hunger
And our master’s will

Background of the Poet

Philip Obioma Chinedu Umeh studied English at the University of Lagos; taught English at the Government College, Umuahia where he was senior English Master until 1978, and where he himself had been a student, from 1955 to 1961, one year below the writer and political martyr, Ken Saro-Wiwa in the famous school, to whom he addresses a eulogy, “To Ken Saro Wiwa” in his poems: Victor Ludorum – For the Spartan rigours of Umuahia All for Ken Olives for laurels From the city scattered over seven hills All for Ken…

Umeh is a former Director of the National Productive centre, is an aluminous of the University of Lagos. Before joining the Federal Civil Service in 1988, he had worked as an editor with Nelson/Pitman Publishers Limited between 1979 and 1980. H moved to New York in 1981 and worked with Nok Publishers Limited as General Manager, which he occupied till 1985. He is happily married and blessed with children. And, he is an active member of the Abuja Literary Community.

 Umeh used poetic form in his writings to discuss the corruption, poverty and hopelessness he has seen in his native Africa, Nigeria.

BACKGROUND OF THE POEM

This work considers ‘Ambassadors of poverty’ a compound word that refers to bad and corrupt leaders, usually imposed on the masses, who misrepresent their people and the nation, loot and empty the state treasury, leaving the people and the state impoverished, helpless, stagnant, confused and perpetually underdeveloped. Generally, ambassadors are regarded as renowned persons of noble character, diplomats, who represent their people and places (states) in foreign states/areas – in the Diaspora. They are expected to be honest, responsible, reliable, exemplary, and their people’s advocates /the saviour of the people/ (line 10, stanza 2). Unfortunately, the Nigerian elites and bourgeoisie, especially the chief state custodians, are the complete opposites of [real] ambassadors. Umeh describes them thus: Ambassadors of poverty are The corrupt masters of the economy Patriots in reverse order Determined merchants of loot Who boost the economy of the colonial order To impoverish brothers and sisters at home Office loafers in the guise of workers Barons of incompetence Position occupants and enemies of service Locked in corrosive war of corruption With their peoples treasury /line 17/ And killing their future The dubious-sit-tight ‘patriots’ Frustrating the corporate will of their followers

Although politicians are the prime ambassadors of poverty, other elites and the any members of the masses who indulge in any forms of corruption are also ambassadors of poverty. According to Umeh, they are /the political elite/, /the rancorous elite/, /the elusive importers/, /those whose actions and in-action/ reduce their people’s expectations to nothingness/ and /all of us in-actions/. Stressing the particular set of leaders that are ambassadors of poverty in Nigeria, Umeh’s words read: The political elite In air conditioned chambers And exotic cars Tucked away from Their impoverished constituencies The rancorous elite In battle of power And their peoples’ wealth The round trippers The elusive importers Of unseen goods and services Who trip the economy down

By tricking from M For harvest of dollars as import When their people see neither money nor food

Umeh also lashes /the able-bodied men on the streets/ who have no motive, vision and mission and misuse their body for worthless things, such as political thuggery, hired assassination, ritual killing, armed-robbery, theft, burglary, motor parks touting, hooliganism, cultism, criminality of all kinds, and what have you. He blames them for shying away from farming and other meaningful entrepreneurial ventures and often drifting from rural areas to urban areas. He also blames all for failing to do what they ought to do that they never do. Umeh informs that having been ridden by poverty, the ordinary citizens /bargain away/ their conscience in the marketplace to assuage their hunger and master’s will. Ambassadors of poverty also /steal our collective job/ and leave many youths, especially graduates, perpetually jobless– unemployed and underemployed.

SUMMARY OF THE POEM

Ambassadors of Poverty’ is Philip Umeh’s satirical poem that ridicules the corrupt ruling class and followers– failed leadership and followership– and poetically offers several suggestions for change and betterment. It is a nine-stanza of unequal length, with the least stanza being seven lines and the longest, fourteen lines. It is richly styled with figures of speech, simple amidst complex language. Metaphor is used deeply and effectively. It looks at Nigerian political leaders, depicted as symbols in inept and corrupt leadership in Africa. It centres mainly on Nigerian leaders, who are lampooned for turning the giant of Africa into one of the world’s most corrupt and poorest countries. The poetic tone is satirical and pungent, as Umeh discusses how the mismanagement of Nigeria amounts to impoverishment by the state custodians. He avers that poor leadership is the bane of Nigeria development, growth and democracy, which has manifested in the impoverishment of the people owing to self enrichment, the lack of basic social amenities and infrastructure, mismanagement, misappropriation, embezzlement, maladministration and ineptitude, and their enrichment of the West, who are already rich, developed and civilised. The West is indicted by the poet for hypocrisy, which has helped in sustaining bad leaders in office in Nigeria and other parts of Africa. This is neo-colonialism, eroding our society. In stanza five, the Westerners are blamed for sponsoring and fuelling numerous African wars of attrition with sophisticated weapons and harmful technology. In the same vein, the Nigerian citizens are blamed by the poet for not having taken proactive and pragmatic measures [actions] to replace the irresponsible leaders–– ambassadors of poverty–– with responsible, credible real ambassadors (leaders). Nigeria constitutes the microcosmic representation of the ugly development in Africa in particular and such other parts of the globe. Satirising the African post-colonial era of Western mimicry by the leaders and the ruled alike, the former more, Umeh stylistically drives home his satiric message with several poetic techniques, such as simple yet sophisticated diction, wit, sarcasm, irony and humour, among others. With metaphor, the poem becomes interesting for its melancholic yet accessible discourse, which is also a serious one. Complex euphemism and paradox are the predominantly used techniques in the poem, which express the poet’s sarcasm the more. The metaphoric title employed exemplifies this. At different points, the poet’s tone moves from anger to defiance, to irony and finally to desperation and sarcasm. The blank unrhymed nature of the poem showcases the common trend in modern lyrical African poetry, which tends to employ elements of orality, song, lyricism and prosaic language for easy and accessible effects. This style has been popularised by African poets like Christopher Okigbo, Frank Aig-Imoukhuede, and a host of others.

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 The West (foreign country) is indicated by the poet for hypocrisy, which has helped in sustaining bad leaders in office in Nigeria and other parts of Africa. Neo-colonialism is what is eroding our society. In stanza five, the Westerners are blamed for sponsoring and fueling numerous African wars of Attrition with sophisticated weapons and harmful technology. In the same vein, the Nigerian citizens are to be blamed by the poet for not having taken proactive and pragmatic measures (actions) to replace the irresponsible leaders (the ambassadors of poverty), with responsible credible real ambassadors (leaders).

THEMATIC ANALYSIS

Thematic Analysis Of Ambassadors Of Poverty By Phillip Umeh

THEMATIC ANALYSIS

(a) Theme Of Poverty And Suffering

(b) Theme Of Selfishness

(c) Theme Of Deceitfulness

(d) Theme Of Political And White-collar Corruption

(e) Theme Of Negligence And Nonchalance

Theme of poverty and suffering must come to mind first in this poem. It is the outcome of mismanagement, embezzlement, and awkward supremacy within the country that led the poet to lament on the wide and deep abysm poverty has become in the country. The poet summarized it in the first stanza before spending the rest stanzas to buttress his summary of poverty, suffering and corruption:

"Ambassadors of poverty are

The corru

pt masters of the economy

With their head abroad

And anus at home

Patriots in reverse order

Determined merchants of loot

Who boost the economy of colonial order

To impoverish brothers and sisters at home"

Theme of selfishness seem to be the root cause of the acts perpetrated by the villians wearing the robe of rulers. Since the dawn of time, mankinds have ceased to cure the disease of selfishness dwelling within them and the generationally inherited selfishness has caused much harm to the country described by poet.

Theme of deceitfulness occurred when the grown selfishness made use of deceitfulness as its evil tool. Those expected to be the savior of the masses became otherwise using "tearful stories of rip-off", heartlessness and "alibi as governance" to play on their citizens intelligence while they amass wealth to feather their own nests.

Theme of political and white-collar corruption, the poet described them with mammoth metaphors and imageries such as

"The political elite/ In air conditioned chambers/ And exotic cars..." (according to stanza 4) "Office loafers in the guise of workers/ Barons of incompetence/ With kleptomaniac fingers/ And suckling filaments/ Position occupants and enemies of service/ Locked in corrosive war of corruption/ With their peoples' treasury/ And killing their future"(according to stanza 2)

They perpetrated their corruption through counterfeiting and vain promises providing the populace "With death traps for roads/ Mud for water, candle for light/ Underneath trees for schools/ Rats for protein/ Fasting as food/ And alibi as governance" in stanza 4 of the poem.

Theme of negligence and nonchalance by the masses was also pointed out as one of the causes of poverty the people suffered; they became nonchalant and neglected the destructive hands causing suffering because they were lazy "able-bodied men on the streets/ Without motive, without vision, without mission/ Men fit for farms/ But glued to the city/ Hungry and desperate/ Constituting willing tools in the hands/ Of political overlords" and because the hardworking one were striving for their own survival:

"Ambassador of poverty are

All of us whose in-actions

Steal our collective joy

Because of what we should do

Which we never do

As we bargain away

Our conscience in the market place

Under the weight of poverty

To assuage our hunger

And our masters' will."

MORE THEMES OF THIS POEM

1. The collective malaise and lethargy imposed by bad leadership and poverty on the populace
2. The hypocrisy and negative influence of the Western world on post-colonial Africa;
3. Mediocrity and the incompetence of corrupt leaders and public office holders;
4. The destruction of the collective psyche and morals of the citizens due to corruption;
5. The corruption of power;
6. The stratification of society between the rich political class and the poor ignorant masses;
7. The destruction of human values and hope and their replacement by social retrogression;
8. The lack of direction and purpose due to poverty and listlessness of the youth;